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### Conceptualising inclusive pedagogy

The inclusive pedagogical approach in action

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## **Chapter 2**

### **Conceptualising inclusive pedagogy**

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#### **Introduction**

In today's world, the curriculum in many countries is driven by international competition that places a premium on high academic standards and the skills thought to produce economic advantage. While the goal is to improve standards for everyone, competition between students, schools and jurisdictions rank order the top students (standardised achievement tests), the best schools (school inspections), and the highest performing jurisdictions (international comparison tests of student performance by country). Such rankings are often underpinned by 'bell-curve thinking', a term used by Fendler and Muzaffar (2008) to refer to the widespread acceptance in education of the assumption that most phenomena (e.g. intelligence, ability, performance) can be distributed according to the statistical principles of the normal curve. An education system dominated by such thinking is inherently problematic because any normal distribution requires nearly half of what is being assessed (students, schools, jurisdictions) to be below average.

At the same time, schools are more diverse than ever before in terms of ethnicity, culture, languages spoken, disability status and so forth. Yet, the inherent bias in systems that are designed for most students on the grounds that something different can be available to some pathologises linguistic, cultural, cognitive and other kinds of difference. It also tends to disproportionately effect students who are ethnic minority and are often more likely to be living in poverty than other children. While it has become self-evident that differentiated approaches to whole class teaching are needed to accommodate individual differences between learners, when implemented within the bell curve structure of schooling, such approaches can create problems. This is because the discourse of individual differences relies on the logic of exclusion whereby differentiated teaching for some is the process by which all are 'included'. The resulting repetition of exclusion (Allan, 2006; Slee, 2010) is a key problem for inclusive education.

This chapter introduces the concept of inclusive pedagogy as an alternative approach that addresses the repetition of exclusion issue by actively avoiding the problems associated with marking some learners as different. The approach builds on work that seeks to develop alternatives to ability grouping (e.g. Hart, et al, 2004). It was developed in response to concerns about variability in the quality of provision that is available within and across educational jurisdictions. That is, while almost every country can point to examples of inclusive schools where all students have access to good quality provision, every country has too many others who do not have such access. Inclusive pedagogy is based on the idea that such variability is fundamentally unfair but can be addressed by focusing on two key areas of educational development: the lessons that are being learned from the study of good quality practices, and how these lessons can be

shared in ways that lead to improvements in situations where the provision is less well developed. The chapters in this book explore how the approach can be used in teaching various subjects of the curriculum.

### The problem of individual differences

The commonplace presumption that certain individuals need something different or additional to that which is provided to others of similar age has had profound implications for the development of educational provision and interventions. It is foundational to contemporary forms of special education established in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as way of accommodating the increasing diversity of expanding school systems that were a consequence of compulsory education (Winzer, 2014). Indeed, a commonly understood definition of special education in many countries is provision that is ‘additional to’ or ‘different from’ that which is ordinarily provided to others of similar age. Similar thinking has underpinned other targeted interventions such as bilingual education, and programmes for ‘disadvantaged’ students, for example, Roma or newly arrived migrant children. In addition, it was often assumed that separate provision would inevitably be needed for children with disabilities or patterns of behaviour commonly associated with educational difficulties. Consequently, a large body of research on learning has focused on how learners vary and the implications of such variances, including identifying and matching teaching interventions to learning differences.

This intuitive idea has remained popular in policy and practice in many countries, but, as I have argued elsewhere (Florian, 2015), individualised approaches have also limited the development of more inclusive practice. This is because:

1. Different teaching strategies are not differentially effective with different types of learners (Ysseldyke, 2001). When one looks carefully at this literature the recommendations about 'what works' are often indistinguishable from each other and not very helpful to teachers. Moreover, because such interventions are based on a traditional special needs approach to student diversity that focuses on difference as a problem, attempts to match them to certain special types or patterns of learning do not help to expand or enhance the educational provision, approaches and teaching strategies that are already generally available.
2. Studies of specialist teaching suggest that the salient distinction in teaching students with special educational needs is what Vaughn and Linan-Thompson (2003) have called the delivery of instruction. Here the emphasis is on how teaching strategies are modified or adapted rather than on the use of different strategies to those that are effective with others.
3. Including *all* students by differentiating for *some* still marks some students as different and can reproduce exclusion rather than facilitate inclusion in classroom learning activities.
4. When students who encounter difficulties in learning are identified as having 'special educational needs' an intractable cycle is formed – they are assumed to possess difficulties in learning, and judgments are often made based on assumptions that they possess *all* of the characteristics associated with the particular difficulty in learning. In other words, despite known variation between individual within any given group, the tendency is to assume the group members have the same learning needs.

5. Identification of 'special educational needs' often results in lowered expectations about what it is possible for a student to achieve.

These problems do not mean that there are no educationally relevant differences between learners, but because the assumption that some students will need something 'different from' or 'additional to' that which is generally available to others of similar age has become normalised in educational thinking, alternatives are not considered. As a form of 'bell curve thinking', this positions differences between learners as a problem. Of course bell curve thinking in education does not mean there are not other reasons why some children struggle in school, but when they are identified as members of a group that need something different to others, they become disadvantaged by being positioned at the margins of what is on offer to others. Often, a lowering of expectations follows.

And yet there are many sources of variation within and between any identified groups of learners make educationally relevant distinctions between them difficult because the variations between members of a given group make it hard to predict or evaluate provision for individuals in it. All children have much in common, including the fact that each and every student is unique. To move away from exclusion, a change of focus to one that *accepts* differences between students as an ordinary aspect of human development is needed. The key challenge lies in determining how teachers might respond to differences between individual students without perpetuating the marginalization that can occur when some are treated differently from others.

The inclusive pedagogical approach

The need for new ways of understanding the nature of effective teaching strategies for students who experience difficulties in learning that both capitalises on and extends teachers' professional knowledge about 'what works' for all students in different contexts (Florian & Kershner, 2009), has prompted a number of studies that have explored how teachers enact inclusive education in their classrooms. Our work has attempted to address some of the conceptual difficulties associated with inclusive education such as lack of definition, (Göransson and Nilholm, 2014; McLeskey, Waldron, Spooner & Algozzine, 2014) by studying how teachers and school staff understand and enact inclusive practices (e.g. Rouse & Florian, 1997; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Some of our work has addressed such questions as whether or not there is special pedagogy for children with different types of learning needs (Davis and Florian, 2004); and whether or not the inclusion of students identified with special educational needs holds back the progress of others (Rouse & Florian, 2006; Black-Hawkins, Florian and Rouse, 2007). Like many others, we initially located our orientation to inclusive education in critiques of special education research that questioned the efficacy of separate special education provision (e.g. Skrtic, xxxx) but have expanded our orientation by adopting a broad concept of diversity in our research.

It is important to acknowledge that while the origins of inclusive education may be located in the search for alternatives to the problems associated with special education, it is not accurate to view inclusive education as either a new form of or an alternative to special education. While there are approaches to inclusive education that are firmly rooted in special education traditions (e.g. McLeskey, Waldron, Spooner & Algozzine, 2014), and co-exist with efforts to reform schools so that they become more inclusive

(e.g. Ainscow, Booth, Dyson, 2006), there are other approaches to inclusive education that reject special education. Consequently, there are divergent definitions reflecting distinctive approaches that have emerged simultaneously in different jurisdictions and it is hardly surprising that reviews of inclusive education conclude that it lacks clear definition (ARACY, 2013; Göransson & Nilholm, 2014; Winter & O' Raw, 2012) While some have become disillusioned with the lack of clarity and conceptual difficulties in defining inclusion, others have pursued various lines of research designed to explore different ideas about what inclusion means and what inclusive practices might look like. Inclusive pedagogy represents one example. As will be shown, the approach attends to individual differences between learners but differs from special education approaches insofar as it does so via a shift in focus from individual needs to individual needs within the socio-cultural context in which learning takes place.

Extending what is generally available.

The approach to inclusive pedagogy detailed below sets out to replace traditional approaches which rely on individualised teaching because of the unintended negative effects of individualisation. It challenges some traditional ways of thinking about the issue of educational inclusion, and encourages teachers and educational researchers to work in new ways that are responsive to the changing demographic composition of today's schools. Its focus is on improving the quality of mainstream education and the role that schools can play in reducing inequality in attainment outcomes by reducing the need for practices that have been shown to discriminate between different groups of learners.



The inclusive pedagogical approach does not ignore individual differences between students but follows Clark, Dyson and Milward's (1995) idea that inclusive education is about "extending the scope of ordinary schools so they can include a greater diversity of children" (p v). In our work, extending the scope of the ordinary school is represented by a shift in thinking about individual differences between learners that focuses on learning as a shared activity and thereby avoids the potentially negative effects of treating some students as different. It builds on previous research (Black-Hawkins, Florian & Rouse, 2007), which examined how some schools have developed strategies to raise the achievement of all children, and other studies that focused on teacher craft knowledge about how they extend what is generally available to all (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2010; Black-Hawkins and Florian, 2012). Findings from these projects suggested that teachers, engaged in inclusive pedagogical practice, work out what they can do to support the learner while avoiding situations that mark some students as different. This does not rule out the use of specialists or specialist knowledge but it is the way that support is provided that is distinctive. It is in the *ways* that teachers respond to individual differences, the pedagogical *choices* they make and *how* they utilise specialist knowledge that differentiates inclusive practice from other pedagogical approaches. The table below presents the alternative to individualized approaches to difference represented by the inclusive pedagogical approach.

Table 1  
Contrast of ‘individualised’ and inclusive pedagogical approaches

Additional needs approach to Inclusion	Manifest in terms of inclusion	Manifest in terms of exclusion	Inclusive pedagogical approach
	Most and Some		Everybody
<p>A student with dyslexia needs specialist support to develop literacy skills. A multi-disciplinary team that includes a psychologist, a reading specialist and a speech and language therapist assesses her and make recommendation about the type and amount of support that is needed.</p>	<p>The student is included in selected classroom activities that do not require literacy skills.</p>	<p>The student receives additional support in a ‘base’ classroom where she can receive specialist support to develop literacy skills.</p> <p>The student is marked as different because she is getting special treatment.</p>	<p>The class teacher takes account of the individual needs of all students in the classroom and plans a lesson with differentiated options that will ensure that each student will be able to participate in the lesson. However, while the class teacher takes account of differences between learners, he does not predetermine the learning that is possible by assigning students to different options. Instead he allows the students to direct the course of their own learning through choice of activities.</p> <p>The student with dyslexia remains a part of the community of the classroom. By making choices available to everybody, individualised support is provided to her in a way that does not stigmatise her as ‘less able’.</p>

(source, Florian, 2015)

A socio-cultural perspective on learning.

Inclusive pedagogy is located within Alexander’s (2004) socio-cultural framework on pedagogy where the complexities inherent in providing for differences among students are subsumed within a set of interrelated ideas about children, learning,

teaching and curriculum, as well as the school and policy contexts by which they are legitimised (for a discussion see Florian & Kershner, 2009). A socio-cultural perspective is important because it permits a consideration of individual differences as something to be expected and understood in terms of the interactions between many different variables rather than fixed states within individuals. Difference is not the problem; rather understanding that learners differ and how the different aspects of human development interact with experience to produce individual differences is the theoretical starting point for inclusive pedagogy. This stance focuses on how the teacher thinks about everybody in the class and how they will work together, as opposed to differentiating for some on the basis of judgments about what some cannot do compared to most others of similar age. It permits a consideration of individual differences as something to be expected and encourages a view of learning as the development of expertise (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000).

Inclusive pedagogy assumes that individual differences between learners do not have to be construed as problems inherent within learners that are outside of the expertise of classroom teachers. Drawing on sociocultural views of learning, we take the view that knowledge develops through shared activity in social contexts. Understanding that *every* learner is different is the theoretical starting point for inclusive pedagogy. While socio-cultural factors produce individual differences, learning occurs through shared activity in social contexts. Thus, the teacher must think about everybody in the class and how they will work together, as opposed to differentiating for some on the basis of judgments about what they cannot do compared to others of similar age. As teachers engage and reflect on what constitutes ‘acts of teaching’ when students experience difficulty they

create the conditions for inclusive education to flourish. This is brought to fruition by ways of working that are collaborative and strategic.

When an intervention is based solely on an individualized (or personalized) response to impairment, or a specific difficulty in learning, important contextual requirements may be overlooked. Thinking about learning as a shared activity where a single lesson is a different experience for each participant encourages a shift in thinking away from teaching approaches that work for *most* learners existing alongside something ‘additional’ or ‘different’ for those (*some*) who experience difficulties, towards one that involves providing rich learning opportunities that are sufficiently made available for *everyone*, so that all learners are able to participate in classroom life. It is the ways that teachers respond to individual differences during whole class teaching, the choices they make about group work and how they utilise specialist knowledge that matters. The shift in thinking is about how to extend what is generally available to ensure that everyone has the opportunity for meaningful engagement in the learning community of the classroom.

A shift in thinking from ‘most and some’ to everybody.

Supporting class teachers to extend what is generally available to *everybody* rather than including *all* students by differentiating for *some*, is an important shift in thinking that can avoid the negative effects of treating some students as different. Focussing on how class teachers extend what is ordinarily available in a classroom lesson or activity, offers an alternative perspective that reflects what has been learned from the studies of teachers who are adept at embedding responsiveness to individual need within the process of whole class teaching (Jordan and Stanovich, 1998; Jordan, Schwartz & McGhee-Richmond, 2009). The inclusive pedagogical approach is one that privileges the

importance of participation in classroom activities. For example, rather than setting work for students based on teacher judgment, a teacher might make a range of differentiated lesson options available, based on knowledge of the range of interests, previous experiences, needs and abilities of everyone, available to the whole class. By giving everyone a choice, individual needs can be met without pre-determining who can do what. We have described this as inclusive pedagogy, or the inclusive pedagogical approach. While it is broadly similar to universal design for learning (UDL), it varies in the extent to which it engages students in directing the course of their own learning and encourages teachers to abandon practices that pre-determine what students can achieve. The examples below are adapted from Florian & Linklater (2010) provide (edited) stories from two teachers' that illustrate inclusive pedagogy in action.

Writing poetry:

*For my lesson the children were asked to write poems based on a theme of winter. I ensured diversity in the tasks that I was giving the children by allowing them choice of task [in the] style of poem they could decide to do. I also involved them in peer assessment after they had written the poems which allowed them to share the learning with each other and learn from each other. So instead of ability labelling in this lesson, I gave the children a choice....I gave them the option of completing a guided sensory poem in which they could fill out the structure 'I hear/ I see/ I smell and I feel winter is' ...I thought the children who were not very confident in writing poems could choose to use this very structured plan Another poem they could choose to write was an acrostic poem, which was a favourite within the*

*class. Children could choose how complex or how simple to make the poem. They could use a word like 'ice' ...with only three letters; or some more adventurous words like 'snowflakes'. The third poem was a four line verse poem that they could choose and this gave them total free range of the poetry that they wrote, which some of the pupils took advantage of. So I think giving the children this choice allowed this to lift the limits of their learning because I wasn't segmenting them in their ability groups which they otherwise they would have been placed in.*

*Usually in a writing lesson, the lower ability group are sent off to a work area totally separate from the rest of the class.. But one of the girls, who was in this group just jumped at the chance and really was excited to stay in the class and work with everybody else. So I think that this had a remarkable effect in poetry writing ..., and she did prove herself too. I decided to give her the same choice as everybody else and she proved herself there with writing a wonderful poem.*

*So, I believe that giving the children allows a higher quality of poems that we received and the learners were far more motivated in their learning and in their trying to write their poetry. So every child at the end of this lesson when I asked "Would anyone like to show their poem or read their poems to class?" everybody (makes an exciting sound) were so proud of their work and it was lovely to see that. So I don't think I would have got that same effect if I'd given them "you must do an acrostic poem; you must do the sensory one" I don't think they would have had the same joy in what*

*they created. So by implementing co-agency I believe that I included everybody because everybody had an equal choice and chance to succeed and I also implemented trust and just came about that the children trust, I trusted the children to choose work suitable for their confidence level and what they believe that they could achieve.*

#### A French lesson

*I had been using some of the language to open the lesson and close the lesson, and little bits in the middle, and they haven't been used to it and I was sort of nervous about taking it further ...I was absolutely stunned at how it changed the classroom environment. And it wasn't just with those that you might expect to do well... It was with all of them, they all started to speak back in French when they asked something. On Friday someone asked a question in French and I replied in French, and he said "Merci" and I said "De rien"; and he sort of looked at me and I could just see some of the others were beginning to look at me like I'd said derriere – bottom and I said "no, no, no", so I went, and I wrote it on the board and I heard this rustling behind me, and they were all grabbing their vocabulary books, scribbling it down... It is such a missed opportunity if you don't just try and do it...*

*And I suddenly realised how much more they were capable of. ...I tried different things as far as the pace of the lesson, and introducing different ways of doing things, and then I introduced things like a favourite word...*

*About the language not just about learning vocabulary, different things with homework that was optional... I said to them some of these things we have not covered but just use the materials that we've got... They all got everything right.*

*The last two weeks I did a project with them, because they were far ahead... and that was when they made the DVD... And just had the freedom. And they did superbly well: they made scripts that they've read in French... And one of the boys from one of the groups went home and came back with a worksheet. From the point of view of language it made me realize they can do so much more... and made me realize that I still wasn't scratching the surface of potential that they have... ..It was done with strengths. One girl was incredibly assertive...in terms of managing her group and I had never seen that at all in the classroom, it would not have come out at all. It wouldn't have come out if I had put her into a group...*

Researching the inclusive pedagogical approach.

The focus of research that seeks to understand how teachers extend what is generally available to others taking account that there are always individual differences between them has established a new direction for research on inclusive education. Table X presents the framework through which the study of the shift in thinking from most and some, to everybody, can be located. Initially developed as a lens to guide research on developing the inclusive practices of primary and secondary classroom teachers (Florian



& Spratt, 2104), the framework provides a structure within which practice can be studied in context.

Insert table X (IPAA Framework) about here

As shown in Table X, shifting the gaze from ‘most’ and ‘some’ to ‘everybody’, as suggested by the inclusive pedagogical approach is underpinned by the three assumptions and associated actions for practice. Key challenges that impinge on the associated actions are also presented. The intention is that by engaging with the challenges described in the table, more nuanced and sophisticated understandings of how to support the participation and learning of everyone can be developed. In the chapters that follow, examples of how the approach can be linked to different subjects of the curriculum are presented.

### Conclusion

Today, it is widely acknowledged that differences in educational opportunities for children depend not only on their individual cultural, economic, health or disability circumstances, but also on where they live, the schools they attend, and the ways in which educational systems are structured, regulated and supported in their home country. The concept of inclusive pedagogy was developed as an alternative to ‘bell-curve’ thinking and the associated limitations that such thinking place on the development of inclusive practice. It rejects the idea that it is educationally helpful to base teaching approaches on categories of learners, particularly when the categories are described in terms of attributes about people and responded to the concern that an emphasis on studying human differences perpetuates the belief that they are predictive of difficulties in learning and potential achievement.

Over time, it has become increasingly clear that teaching strategies are more appropriately aligned with what is being taught than who is learning. This is not to suggest that individual differences between learners are unimportant. Rather, it requires attending to the idea that teachers are already responding to individual differences between learners within the context of classroom teaching because every classroom contains human diversity. Teachers take account of all kinds of difference in their daily practice because learners vary across many dimensions.

As an alternative way of working, the inclusive pedagogical approach begins with a shift in pedagogical thinking from an approach that works for *most* learners existing alongside something additional or different for those (*some*) who experience difficulties, towards one that involves providing rich learning opportunities that are sufficiently made available for *everyone*, so that all learners are able to participate in classroom life. By focusing on how achievements in learning are realised through participation in the community of a classroom, the inclusive pedagogical approach acknowledges individual differences between learners but avoids the problems and stigma associated with marking some learners as different. In this way inclusive education becomes more than a way of including students with disabilities. It becomes a way of improving learning outcomes for everyone. In this way, a shift in focus away from traditional approaches to individualization that provide for all by differentiating for some helps to open up new possibilities for teaching and learning that benefit everyone.

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